



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

September 9, 2005

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to share two concerns that have been brought to my attention regarding the safety of first responders in the Delta and Gulf Coast regions following Hurricane Katrina.

Specifically, I am concerned that the Worker Safety and Health Provisions of the National Response Plan have not been activated in response to the massive disaster in the Gulf States.

In addition, mental health professionals seeking to contribute their experience as trauma psychologists for first responders conducting search and recovery in the affected areas have faced unexpected roadblocks and are seeking assistance reaching those in need.

Congressman
Christopher Shays
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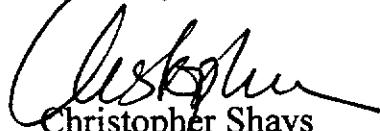
It is my understanding the National Response Plan was developed and issued by the Department of Homeland Security in December 2004 in response to Homeland Security Directive (HSPD) - 5 which directed the development of a new plan to align federal coordination structures, capabilities and resources into a unified, all discipline, and all-hazards approach to domestic incident management. It seems to me that a toxic environment such as that which exists in New Orleans is exactly the type of situation in which this plan can be implemented.

Instead, it is my understanding safety and health issues are being addressed on a case by case basis, with no systematic planning/coordination for a safety and health plan, identifying/assessing hazards or making sure that workers are adequately trained. The decision to waive Davis-Bacon could also mean clean-up work will go to low cost contractors who don't have trained, qualified employees.

With regard to mental health specifically, I have attached the proposal of a constituent, Dr., Michael Lonski, who provided mental health services to first responders at Ground Zero following 9/11 and who has testified before the National Security Subcommittee, which I chair. It seems to me that in addition to training for physical safety procedures, activation of the Worker Safety and Health Provisions will allow for the service of mental health professionals like Dr. Lonski.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me or my chief of staff, Betsy Hawkings, at 202/225-5541.

Sincerely,



Christopher Shays
Member of Congress

CS:bh

These children have absorbed 4 years of the fear, trauma and grief experienced by their parents who were deployed in this country after 9/11. Many of those children have parents who have been sent overseas in military operations. Now they are now re-experiencing the sadness and grief and "unavailability" of their first responder parents due to the 4th Anniversary of 9/11. Those same fears and apprehensions lead to an incalculable amount of preoccupation that affects their schoolwork, social relation and family structure. Having their parents now deeply involved in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina only makes them more vulnerable.

Las Vegas is not the answer. We will formulate one based on our years of professional experience dealing with traumatic life matters.

At the Congressional hearings last Sept, we were the only independent group there who had successfully collaborated with every other entity at the hearings including Mt. Sinai Rescue and Recovery Program, NIOSH, Chinatown, the municipal labor unions and construction crews. We have worked with the American Red Cross, the NY National Guard, Special Operations Command-FDNY, NYS Crime Victims Board, NYS Office of Children and Family Services, September 11th Families Association and Clergy Crisis Responders.

As a trauma psychologist licensed in CT and NY, a Level 1 HazMat Technician and a Deacon in our church, who has published on the complexity of designing proactive mental health support programs post-disaster and testified before Congress, and lectured internationally, and managed grants from the NYS-CVB (funded by DOJ), American Red Cross 9/11 Disaster Relief Fund, NYS OCFS, I have a history of designing successful mental health programs that save people thousands in lost earnings and lost health and lost hope. Our organization, Life Matters has the resources and experience to help at this time.

Dr. Lonski